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New York

President:	Mr. Negroponte	(United States of America)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	Bulgaria	Mr. Tafrov
	Cameroon	Mr. Tidjani
	Chile	Mr. Maquieira
	China	Mr. Wang Guangya
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Germany	Mr. Pleuger
	Guinea	Mr. Sow
	Mexico	Mr. Aguilar Zinser
	Pakistan	Mr. Khalid
	Russian Federation	Mr. Gatilov
	Spain	Ms. Menéndez
	Syrian Arab Republic	Mr. Mekdad
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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03-57243 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, and in the absence of objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Prendergast: We are meeting at a low point. It is urgent to re-establish momentum towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Sadly, however, the trend is increasingly in the opposite direction. Instead of moving forward, we are seeing backward movement, away from a peaceful settlement and away from the negotiating table. Instead of mutually reinforcing confidence-building measures, we are seeing far too much by way of mutually reinforcing confidence-destroying measures. Instead of policies and actions that encourage the parties to move towards one another, meeting in the centre, the effect of actions taken by both Israelis and Palestinians has been to weaken moderates on both sides and to encourage extremists. Suicide bombings, rejectionist language, extrajudicial killings, walls that extend deep into the occupied Palestinian territory, the destruction of homes, expropriations and continued settlement activity lead both Israelis and Palestinians to feelings of hopelessness, despair, hatred, rage and revenge. Worst of all, they leave each side doubting whether it has in the other a partner for peace and questioning the viability of the two-State solution.

Since the previous briefing, we have witnessed an escalation of violence that has crossed previously respected lines, principles and borders. Events during the past month include a suicide bomb in Haifa, the first Israeli air strike into Syria in 30 years, serious and fatal violations of the Blue Line, Israeli army incursions into Rafah in the Gaza Strip, increasingly tight closures in the West Bank and Gaza that have exacerbated the already dire humanitarian conditions of Palestinians and a terrorist attack on a United States diplomatic convoy in Gaza that killed three innocent people. During the past three days alone, 21 Palestinians were killed during Israeli military operations and 3 Israeli soldiers were killed in the West Bank.

It ought to be clear by now that violence only begets violence, and that there is no military solution to the conflict. Lasting stability will be found only when the parties reach a just, lasting and comprehensive peace agreement.

The Secretary-General has repeatedly called on the parties to return to the negotiating table. It is clear, however, that they are unable to do so on their own. The level of trust between them is too low and the lines of communication too weak. This makes it imperative that the international community reassert its role in Middle East peacemaking. The Quartet must assist the parties along the road map to peace. Implementation of the road map has been stalled for too long.

Since the last briefing to the Security Council, 80 people have lost their lives to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: 27 Israelis, 50 Palestinians and, now, 3 American diplomatic security officers. This raises the death toll since September 2000 to 2,858 Palestinians and 857 Israelis.

On 4 October, a suicide bomber struck a crowded restaurant in Haifa, resulting in a death toll that has recently risen to 21. The casualties were both Jewish and Arab. I reiterate the Secretary-General's strong and consistent condemnation of such acts of terrorism. The deliberate targeting of civilians is a war crime, and cannot be justified by any cause. We call on the Palestinian Authority to bring to justice those who plan and carry out such attacks and to live up to its obligations under the road map as regards security.

On 5 October, Israel launched an air strike against Syrian territory. An attack by one State on another's sovereign territory is a dismaying new escalation in the regional dimension of the conflict. The Secretary-General strongly deplored this action, and called on all

sides to exercise restraint. By disturbing a front that has been stable for many years, the Israeli action risks broadening and deepening the already complex network of conflicts in the region and encouraging extremists everywhere.

Since 9 October, the Israeli army has conducted operations in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, aimed, according to the Government of Israel, at destroying tunnels used for the smuggling of arms. According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), 12 Palestinians were killed, including 2 children and an UNRWA schoolteacher. UNRWA reports that 189 buildings were demolished or rendered uninhabitable, and some 1,780 people have lost their homes as of 20 October.

We recognize Israel's right to defend itself against terrorist attacks. However, the right of self-defence is neither unconditional nor unlimited. It must be exercised in proportionate terms, and in keeping with Israel's obligations under international law. It should not be exercised in such a way that large numbers of Palestinians are made to suffer for the acts of a violent minority. The consequences of these actions could be viewed as collective punishment, which is a violation of international humanitarian law.

On 15 October, last week, a bomb attack in the Gaza Strip on a United States diplomatic convoy resulted in the deaths of three American security officers. This deliberate attack on diplomatic personnel, which we condemn in the strongest terms, was unprecedented and completely unacceptable. The Secretary-General has condemned it as a terrorist act. The bombing, which was clearly carefully planned, represents a worrying widening of the conflict, and raises serious security concerns for United Nations and international personnel working in Gaza.

Yesterday, at least 14 Palestinians were killed, with scores of civilian casualties, in a series of Israeli air strikes on Gaza. These attacks appeared to be aimed at carrying out extrajudicial killings. They followed a series of rocket attacks by Palestinians into southern Israel. Again, Israel has conducted military operations in crowded civilian areas, with sadly predictable results. We once more call on the Government of Israel to cease the use of disproportionate and indiscriminate force in civilian areas. We also again call for a halt to extrajudicial killings.

If the parties are to re-engage with the negotiation process, they must be in a position to send to the negotiating table representatives who can commit to credible confidence-building measures.

In this connection, we note the Palestinian Authority's efforts to appoint a new prime minister. As called for in the road map, that prime minister should be empowered and credible, and, with the Minister of the Interior, should be the person to whom consolidated Palestinian security forces would report. We would expect the new prime minister to take immediate steps to establish law and order, diminish violence and start operations to confront those who engage in terror. These steps would begin to address Israel's security concerns and build the confidence necessary to develop a partnership for peace.

For its part, in keeping with its obligations under the road map, and in order to build confidence on the Palestinian side, the Government of Israel must reverse its policy of settlement expansion and implement a settlement freeze. In addition, it must halt construction of the security wall that it is building on Palestinian land and remove those sections already constructed. These steps would begin to address Palestinian concerns about the viability of the future Palestinian State and assist in building support among the Palestinian people for the peace process.

The Quartet principals — the Secretary-General, Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov, United States Secretary of State Powell, Italian Foreign Minister Frattini, European Union High Representative Solana and European Commissioner Patten — met on 26 September to review the situation in the Middle East. The Principals noted that they viewed the situation with great concern, and reaffirmed their commitment to continue working together to achieve progress towards peace. They remained eager to assist the parties to meet their road map obligations. In his own capacity, the Secretary-General called for a revitalized and active international involvement, asserting that, if steps are not taken, all of us will pay a heavy price.

Let me mention a rare positive note amid the general gloom, in the shape of the track-two effort referred to as the Geneva Accord. Mr. Yossi Beilin and Mr. Yasser Abed Rabbo and others have reportedly led Israelis and Palestinians through a process of imagining a future final status settlement that details

possible solutions based on the same goal as that of the road map: a two-State solution and the end to occupation. The Secretariat has not yet seen the text of this plan, and we cannot comment on the details. But we welcome any initiatives that bring Israelis and Palestinians together to discuss their common future. Real and lasting peace will be made as much by people working together for reconciliation as it will be by official parties reaching agreement. However, there is no substitute for the official representatives of the Israeli and Palestinian people returning to the negotiating table and progressing down the road to peace, as called for in the road map.

The disappointing setbacks in the quest for peace have had a continuing deleterious effect on humanitarian conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory. We continue to observe increased economic hardship and further reduced capacity of the Palestinian Authority to deliver essential services to its population. Unemployment rates in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have risen to 36 per cent, and the number of Palestinians below the poverty line is at 60 per cent.

Severe restrictions on the movement of humanitarian goods and aid workers remain in place. The aid and donor community recognizes Israel's security concerns and wishes to be responsive to them. However, donors fail to understand the logic of measures that increase insecurity for the civilian population and the aid community, and that raise the complexity and cost of providing assistance. The aid community feels that the Government of Israel has thus far failed to appoint a high-level empowered interlocutor to discuss these policy issues, and that, as a result, it has to spend substantial time responding to unpredictable and seemingly arbitrary regulations and procedures that make its work increasingly expensive, dangerous and frustrating.

A meeting of the capitals-level Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, which is composed of key donors, is scheduled to take place on 18 and19 November. The meeting will enable donors to discuss Palestinian economic stabilization and emergency needs. The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee will also address the donor community's ongoing support to the Palestinian Authority's reform efforts and the problems encountered in this endeavour. The meeting will coincide with the launch of the United Nations Consolidated Appeal, which highlights the need to address the deepening humanitarian crisis faced in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Allow me to say a word about the construction of the separation barrier, or wall, which continues to deeply worry not only Palestinians but the international community as a whole. Over the last month, the speed of construction has accelerated. In a recently released report, the co-chairs of the all-donor Local Aid Coordination Committee — namely, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories (UNSCO), the World Bank and Norway — drew particular attention to the rapid expansion of Israel's separation barrier around East Jerusalem. There alone, the wall affects tens of thousands of Palestinians as it divides communities and families and threatens to seal Jerusalem off from the rest of the West Bank. Palestinians along the barrier's route face land loss and severely restricted access to jobs, markets and essential social services. We repeat our call to the Israeli authorities to halt construction of the wall.

On 2 October the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) issued an extensive military order declaring those areas between the separation wall and the Green Line to be militarily closed areas. The order covers the entire northern trajectory of the wall — approximately 25,000 acres, where as many as 12,000 Palestinians would be left in enclaves between the wall and the Green Line. The order prohibits any person from entering or exiting these areas except, as it states, "those entitled to the law of return, Israelis, or Palestinians who have special permanent or temporary permits". It explicitly specifies that people age 12 and older who resided in those areas before the military order was issued must now have entry permits to continue doing so. Free access will be granted only to Israelis. The order marks an unacceptable deepening of restrictions against the Palestinians caught between the barrier and the Green Line.

Recent incidents along the Blue Line and in the region have heightened tensions and highlight the fragility of the situation. The day after the 5 October Israeli air strike into Syria, two hostile incidents occurred along the Blue Line. In the first, on 6 October, it was reported that sniper fire from the Lebanese side of the Blue Line killed an Israeli soldier in an area south of Metulla. Subsequent IDF retaliatory fire damaged a passing United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) vehicle, but caused no injuries.

On 7 October, three rockets were fired towards Israel from the general area of Hula on the Lebanese side of the Line. Two landed inside Lebanon, one on a house, killing one child and seriously injuring another. The third rocket impacted on the Israeli side, constituting a violation but causing no damage. These events underscore yet again the need for the Government of Lebanon to exert control over the use of force from the whole of its territory.

The spiral of events of the first week of October illustrates the significant potential for escalation within the region. With that in mind, on the instructions of the Secretary-General, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Roed-Larsen, travelled to Beirut and Damascus on 8 and 9 October to discuss the regional situation with leaders in both countries. Mr. Roed-Larsen also discussed the situation with Israeli officials. In his meetings in all three countries, he noted that attacks and counter attacks would lead all concerned down a steep and precarious path towards more violence. And, on the Secretary-General's behalf, he advised all parties not to travel down that disastrous road.

It is of paramount importance that all parties exercise the utmost restraint and work through diplomatic channels to resolve their differences. In that regard, the Secretary-General appreciates the approach of the Governments of Syria and Lebanon of turning to the Security Council for redress in response to the Israeli strike. I would also note the Lebanese Central Security Council's statement of commitment last week to preserving calm, security and stability in the country. The Lebanese authorities should be encouraged and supported in this effort.

I would note here that Israeli overflights, which had declined in number in the latter part of September, have showed a marked increase since early October. The continued air violations are not helpful.

In conclusion, let me say that we are living through difficult and dangerous days. The region is faced with a potential broadening and deepening of interlinked conflicts. This is a time for restraint, not incitement. It is a time for statesmanship, not opportunism. It is a time for the parties to look to the longer term and to think of what kind of world they want their children and grandchildren to live in.

The vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security must remain our goal. That vision is part of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, including the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. The road map still offers a viable instrument to get from here to there. But if we are to achieve that vision, it is essential that there be a return to the negotiating table and, meanwhile, not only that restraint be exercised but that there be an end to all acts that undermine confidence among the parties.

There has to be a better way. We cannot continue to lurch from crisis to crisis. Israelis and Palestinians alike feel exhausted by today, and fearful for tomorrow. We have to break the cycle of violence, revenge and escalation. We need to work together to find that better way.

The President: I thank Sir Kieran for his comprehensive briefing. In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I should now like to invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on this subject.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.